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Family and Past – Important Aspects in the Creativity of A.K. Ramanujan

Abstract: Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan (1929-1993) also known as A.K. Ramanujan was an Indian poet who wrote in both English and Kannada language. Ramanujan was a poet, scholar, a philologist, folklorist, and translator. His academic research ranged across five languages: English, Kannada, Tamil, Telgu and Sanskrit. “The Collected Poems”. He works on both conical and modern variants of these literatures and argued strongly for giving local and non-standard dialects. Ramanujan’s poems are enigmatic works of startling originality, sophistication and mooring artistry.

Ramanujan was born in Mysore city. His father Attipat Asuri Krishnaswami was an astronomer and professor of mathematic at Mysore University was known for his interest in English, Kannada and Sanskrit languages. His mother was a house wife. He was educated in English at the University of Mysore and received his Ph.D. in linguistics from Indian University.

He was given the Mac Arthur Prize Fellowship (Shulman, 1994). As an Indo-American write Ramanujan had the experience of the native as well as of the foreign milieu. His poems such as the conventions of Despair “reflected his views on the cultures and convention of the east and the west.” His commentaries in The Interior Landscape: (1967)

and folktales from India, Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages (1991) are good example of his work in Indian folklore studies.

Introduction

Besides many more things, including mythological references, the role of A.K. Ramanujan's family and relations together with his past cannot be ignored, although he spent major parts of his life in Chicago. "They are like two chips in Ramanujan's artistic Kaleidoscope". If family is a sustained symbol in his creative consciousness with him the familial bond endures which engenders in him a superior artist. Therefore important to his creativity.

Naik's study of Ramanujan's in vestment of irony into his family traditions as well as his ethos, comes at time to a point, where the reader may confuse the artists' irony as the mode only of his alienation. The poems referred to by the critics, do not bring into our mind the semblance of alienation as Ramanujan's "Hindoo" poems and his family – and – memory poems do. An ironic awareness of Ramanujan's of his family relations, and his outlook on the Hindu views of life.

In this context "Small Scale Reflection on a Great House" – Ramanujan may be first considered because it is a representative poem of Ramanujan on the family and the Hindu joint family ethos, with all essential qualities of its tradition. Ramanujan's writing symbolizes his experience which he got from past and built future. Critic mind force them to think it in Ramanujan quest for the self.

Harriet Zinnes observes that although Ramanujan writes frequently about his "Indian Ethos", experience and thus "Flavour and poems with the images" of the Indian ethos, "he is completely western in his language, diction and attitude towards the object." Well, the suggestion of Ramanujan's poetry is an example of synthesizing the east and west, but his

“attitude towards the object” is completely western. It may found Ramanujan’s Indianness and his bonding with his family. Many of his poems are dipped in love and attachment.

Ramanujan has beautifully described relationship of wife and husband. The journey of life where two individuals need each other and complete each other.

“Whole in the ambivalent

Of being half woman half-man

Contained in a common body”. (‘Love Poem for a wife’)

The mythical allusion to a god Ardha-Narishwara. Parvatee and Siva contained in a common form creative process. This mythological references in the creativity of Ramanujan’s poetry are important points not to be ignored. Here, with the references of Ardha-Narishwar Ramanujan’s sense of ‘common’ in between husband and wife and their presence in each other’s life physically and mentally. The poet does not leave us wondering in between truth and myths he himself answers all his questions.

“I must seek and will find

My particular hall only in my Hindu mind”.

The process of Indianising the English language is inherent in Ramanujan’s search of the Indian myths and legends into English poetry. It is a fact that in modern age a great revived interest in myths, legends and folklore, a study of which becomes a means of exploration into the nature, mind and spirit of modern man and his age as well. Ramanujan has immaculately introduced many Indian myths into his English poetry. He made a bridge between ancient Indian mythology and modern Indian English literature. No doubt his writing is spiritual but not far from scientific reasons.

Ramanujan knowledge of English was deeply affected by his knowledge of Indian literature and poetics. He lived language and literature in Indianness. The sole of his poetry were nourished from individual knowledge of Indian culture and Indian languages. He

expressed his understanding by his pen with his individuality and Englished the Kannada Vacanas. He also focused on de-Englished English (if such an expression is possible).

The poet's amassments needs to be complimented:

"Lord of lion face, boar snot, and fish eyes, killer of killer, shepherd of rampant elephants, devour my lambs; devout than whole, save them in the zoo garden ark of your belly".

Here, in these lines, the prayer is mix with an ironic attitude, to the God defines the poet's declared premises. With these lines it is also symbolised that with diction and in thoughts and spirit English is deeply affected by an individual's own language knowledge and culture. Ramanujan born in a Telgu language got his education in Kannada language and lived in English language. His influence and nourishment of different language and culture gave him a wonderful talent of writing.

Ramanujan's life inside his home was a secure childhood where he got his upbringing in a traditional joint family lived in culture and tradition which is clearly shown in his writing. The behaviour of a person with the elder person of the family Ramanujan has described his grandmother as loving, lovable and non-opposable figure who is always right and to except her as she is always right not allowed to puts question on her.

The memories of the old granny figure in poems like The Opposable Thumbs – S, Lines to a Granny – S In the God – S and The Hindoo: he does not Hurt a Fly or a Spider either. Granny's fairy tales or counting of five princes with each of her five fingers in a palm that is mysteriously short of one thumb, or her elephantiasis, is wonderfully imaged to sustain a child's curiosity and humour. But the poet in "The Opposable Thumb" seems very often caring out of a child's innocent wonder. From a child's point of view, it is a unconvincing and absurd to see a granny's rolling leg likened to "a log in a ruined mill", too sophisticated a metaphor indeed. For, not by its title alone, but also by its content, the poem is very much a

nursery rhyme. Lines to a Granny brings a different note in which the poet at his youthful adventure of the life, comes to realize that granny tale of prince and princess in love is merely no tale but truth. Because youth is a time when the love-life enacts more fantastic but real drama than what many fanciful stories cook up and tell. There may be also an element of Ramanujan's real life affair here which becomes vibrant in his love-poem "Still another View of Grace". In the however, the grey white adjust stories remind him of grandma's "magooty curds". Such fond memories of a granny are not so loving in another poem "The Hindoo: he does not Hurt a Fly, or a Spider either –" R, Here the "great swinging grandmother"² is seen as Sinning against the "great grandfather". Whom she once bites "spider-fashion" and from the trauma of which the poor man could hardly recover. In the poem, the old man is a beloved figure, described as "that still men, untimely witness, timeless eye, perpetual outsider" whose spirit the poet-persona wonders to have internalised, where as the old rady is cast in poor and doubtful light as "a suspense of nets vibrate under her ways".

However, quite interestingly, when Ramanujan talks of mother, he means her and no other. He leaves us no room for our misgivings about the loving image of his mother, who at times rises to a universal symbol. The poet's reminiscences of Mother could be sensuously gathered from 'Snakes'— 'Mother gives them milk / in saucers / she watches them suck / and bare the black-line design / etched on the bran of the saucer'. In his next poem, "Of Mothers, among other thing" – B – how her sarees do not cling as she picks him up from "the crying cradle" in the wake of rains, or how her "sensible fingers" flex to pick up 'a grain of rice from the kitchen floor happily recollected by the poet'.

Ramanujan generally works through the specifics: mother's silk saree, her crinkled feet, diamond rings, sensible fingers, crippled talon; her bare splayed feet, silver rings on her second toes as in "Love poem for a wife 1" as her "flashing temper" like her twisted silver as in Ecology – SS. It is said that the poet has five sense alert on such relation as Mother. And

significantly his ironic humour is absent from his depiction of the mother-figure. If in “Still Another for Mother”, his memory of a last mother recounts on silence in repeating synonymous expressive like “quietly”, “silent” and the persona-re-lives a heaviness of heart in the lines:

“Something opened

In a past and I heard something

In the future quietly

Like the heavy door

Of my mother’s.... silent house” (“Of Mother”)

In ecology he senses mother lovable facet in her, that is, ancient passion for protecting “flowering tree” that unschooled inborn sense of ecology, which has become a valuable asset for human existence in a world rocked by environmental pollution and ecological imbalance. But, in the poem as it is, her spiritual and aesthetic sense overweights one’s modern attitude to things, to a tree. Ramanujan recalls an evocative manner that “flashing her temper”, Mother “Would not let us cut down/a flowering tree/almost as old as her.../ to give her god and her daughters/ and daughters doubters basketful of annual flower/for me line of cousins/a dower of migraines in season”.

It may be borne in mind that the past has a fruitful bearing on the life and this is vital to Ramanujan’s creative vision. Here, the tree “as old as mother is a symbol of continuity. Ramanujan realizes that both past and present together are in a continuous flow”. Further, the Stanza quoted above gives us an insight into Ramanujan’s deep rootedness in his ethos and culture, and mother becomes a living symbol of closeness and confidence. Not only has this he referred to his poems about his brother and sisters. He also refers to the poet’s irritation at an errant nephew, who with “Stripes on shoulder called an incident on the border” in the Sahara desert... finds expression in “Small-scale Reflections on a Great House”.

Also, there are some poems which exhibit how Ramanujan can be a loving, caring and envious father to his children, worrying for their health or their little games. Ramanujan, the artist remembers outside the gamut of family relations his childhood friends, Gopu and Shivanna. In a rather long narrative poem, “A Minor Sacrifice” – SS he recreates almost a childhood adventure on “a new moon Tuesday” in order to rid the world of scorpions, but by their childish performance of some witchcraft. In an unforeseen, final catastrophe, however, on that very new moon Tuesday, his friend Shivanna expires in a hospital.

There is ample evidence, of course, in these family poems as dealt with above, that many shreds of irony work into every family portrait. This fact reveals again that Ramanujan is not all-out praise for his relations, though it is the relations that keep coming into creative consciousness. As a man, Ramanujan is not forgetful of their love and affections, but as an artist, he is not blind to their lapses. From the study of his family and memory poems, one gathers the impression that the family relations are not meant merely for the grubs of affection, or for meeting the obligations they are such vital bonds as bind man to his family, which he can not escape, which he bears even if he runs away from it. Thus, Ramanujan writes in “Small-scale Reflections on a Great House” “that nothing that even comes into this house goes out”. Family for Ramanujan is an enduring symbol, a great house, a great tradition, into which “things come in every day / to lose themselves among other things / lost long ago among / other things lost long ago”. Even after two decades of his life spent abroad in USA, Ramanujan continues to live the inner life of his own, the umbilical cord of the mother-Indian connections. In this context, Parthasarathy’s observation is aptly made that “a man’s family never leaves him” and that “he takes it with him wherever he goes”, because family is “one unchanging event” around which man’s life continues to revolve. Daruwalla has a similar view of Ramanujan’s family poems as well as of his physical dislocation. The critic in his “Introduction” to Two Decades of Indian Poetry, “The purely physical fact of

“living abroad” does not tell upon Ramanujan’s creativity for “his poetry rests in the shade of the family tree”.

Tamil classics, it is noticed how Ramanujan’s close affinity with his Tamil classics, in terms of idea as well as spirit, has shaped and moulded his creative career as a poet. His enduring motif, family, closely resembles a Tamil Classic, idea embodied in his “Relations”, which reads:

“Like a hunted deer

On the wide white

Salt land,

A flayed hide

Turned inside out,

One may run

Escape.

But living

Among relations

Blinds the feet”. (“Relations”)

Therefore, family occupies an important place in Ramanujan’s art, and his idea of the growth and continuity of an individual personality is closely connected with the family motif. However, his autobiographical accounts as encountered in his poems have transformed his art into something strange and rich. Ultimately, these accounts become subservient to the marvellous realm of art. Ramanujan is a consummate artist to have transmuted the familial themes and the private motifs into their artistic values which endure.

Love is the most important of all human relationships. For some artists, it is a value which they struggle to live upto, in the life as well as in their works of art. Thus, love’s manifold voices unfold in many of Ramanujan’s poems. But blatantly borrowed ideas of

love, or otherwise its stock expressions would scarcely inspire us to its loving touches or livid wounds. What is important in love poems is not the form, nor does the fines, but the fire or the flavour of love, which touches and touch that never vanish:

“Perhaps it will not pair,
For in that touch I think I stumbled
On a pulse, and wondered like fool
Who has no proper sense of body?
It is were yours, or mine,
And wondered it you wondered too”.

(‘The collected poems’- A.K. Ramanujan)

Shakespeare, Keats and Yeats are the great names in love’s temple, because their crafts are dipped in the fount of their own love-lives. There is always the extended arms of the life behind the great works of love, in painting or sculpture, in music or literature. Well, the man in Ramanujan goes into the making of the creator above him. Ramanujan the creator evokes or explores love’s varying moods with his acute sense of the living premises of man’s love life. But the way the love-experiences and the love-poet in modern Indian poetry in English.

One way begin with every individual love lyric of Ramanujan, with a few important general observations, which would reveal the multi-faceted voice of love and also smoothen one’s way through each of them to get at the poet’s vision of the love-relationship. Each love-poem evokes or enacts a drama in monologue. Each moment of love brings in memory and reflection to play. Well, Ramanujan’s poem takes off from a stumble at a moment: a stumble because it is neither a fall nor a lumps, for the life is a continuously changing phenomenon, like flux. This quick moment, seized to invest it with an eternity, is a characteristic features of the classical Tamil love lyrics. Thus, time and experience coalesce in an immediate thrust of

a moment in Ramanujan. The love poems are variously enriched with suggestive association, sudden turns and surprises, comic vivacity and ironic niceties, which again emerge in the nimble moments of life. Characteristically in Ramanujan, love's moment is awaited.

At the outset, “Two Styles in Love” – S may be taken up for a discussion. Concentration is to be made not only because of its complex inner pattern of ideas being its validity beneath the seemingly obvious contrasts, but also because, its spiritual blood stream veins through the best ones of Ramanujan’s love poetry. Love is a growing consciousness as the life is Ramanujan’s inner urge spurs him to capture as many moments of love as possible, form any such instants could possibly approximate to a near total vision of love. For him, love is a slow process and in reality, it is not realised in haste, it must be awaited with patience.

“Love is no hurry, love is no burning come lightly, love, let us wait to be found to be last”.

Ramanujan with his idea of love to be awaited remains one of his contemporary modern poets Nissim Ezekiel, who in his Poem, “Lover Birdwatcher” gives expression to the same:

“To force the pace and never to be still

Is not the way of those who study?

Birds or woman.

The beset poets wait for words”. (‘Lover Birdwatcher’)

Both the poets start from their theoretical concept, the Ezekiel speaks while standing apart from the process, and Ramanujan voices while in the process. Ramanujan’s vision of love grows out of his felt life or passionate understanding of it. His understanding of love-life, man-woman relationship comes oozing, which is spread over his poems.

Conclusion

To sum up it may be said that there is ample evidence in these family poems that irony work into every family portrait. But he is not all-out praise for his relations, though it is the relations that keep coming into creative consciousness, but as an artist, he is not blind to their lapses. From the study of his family and memory poems one gathers the impression that the family relations are not meant merely for the grabs of affection or for meeting the obligations, they are such vital bands as blind man to his family, which he cannot escape, which he bears even if he runs away from it.

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